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A Congressman And an Oilman Go Toe to Toe

It isn't often that a congressional leader and a corporate tycoon wind up snarling at each other in public. The usual procedure is for their aides to get together on the sly and work things out to mutual satisfaction.

But when you have two guys like Mobil Oil's chief executive, William Tavoulaareas, and House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman John D. Dingell (D-Mich.), all bets are off.

These two antagonists have been locked in mortal combat since 1979. Dingell started the feud by accusing the Mobil Oil president of helping his son, Peter Tavoulaareas, create and operate the Atlas Maritime Co. without telling Mobil stockholders about it.

The elder Tavoulaareas, a hard-driving, ruddy-faced, diminutive man with a griddle-hot temper, traced news leaks of his son's alleged misbehavior to Dingell. In a fury, Tavoulaareas marched into the congressman's office and demanded a written apology — written, that is, at Mobil headquarters.

Dingell is an unreconstructed curmudgeon, with a quarter of a century of congressional brawling behind him. He is not about to be intimidated, therefore, by an oil executive.

For two years the two tigers have been clawing at each other, with neither gaining any visible advantage. Last Nov. 20 Tavoulaareas wrote Dingell, "After nearly two years involving meetings and letters between us, I have reluctantly come to the following conclusion: that you in your capacity as a member of the House of Representatives have deliberately misled a citizen who was rightfully trying to defend his reputation

The Tavoulaareas letter then made accusations against one of Dingell's aides, Peter Stockton, allegations that subsequently were fed to The New York Times. As a sort of peroration, Tavoulaareas chastised Dingell by saying, "Finally, you said that you would admit being wrong if I were cleared by the SEC. This has now occurred, as you know, but I have had no word from you."

Far from eliciting an apology from Dingell, the SEC staff's findings are likely to continue the toe-to-toe battle between the congressman and the oilman.

Footnote: A Mobil spokesman said, "Mobil believes the SEC investigation exhaustively examined and completely refuted Dingell's past allegations."

Moscow Gold: The repression in Poland is proving costly to the Soviet Union. It has been selling gold on the world market to keep the Polish economy afloat, according to intelligence sources. The Afghanistan aggression and domestic production failures have added to the pinch.

"Moscow gold"—a buzzword in the 1930s to explain the subversion of political leaders and parties by the communists—is today a carefully watched yardstick of the Soviet economy's strength or weakness. For this reason, the Russians keep their transactions as secret as possible.

But the CIA is able to glean some nuggets on Soviet gold sales. Witness these excerpts from the agency's top-secret documents:

- "Soviet gold sales... were made on the Swiss market and earned Moscow some \$400 million."

- "A 'huge' stock of Soviet gold is reportedly now at the Zurich airport, awaiting sale on the Zurich market."

The commissars are as canny as any capitalists when they market their precious metal, trying to sell when prices high and hold on when prices are low. But the needs of their political adventuring can upset this prudent policy, the CIA reports.

"Moscow increased the volume of sales during periods of rising prices, and cut back when prices fell," a top-secret document states. "In the long run, however, Moscow probably will have to sell gold when prices are at or below current levels."